POLARIZATION OF BALOCH SOCIETY: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract

All federating units of the state of Pakistan have diverse ethnic makeup, distinct cultures, assorted languages and even incongruent life style. These sociological differences have resulted in social division of overall Pakistani society which is evident from emergence of few very serious internal conflicts during past few decades. The enigmatic state versus province conflict in Balochistan has been ongoing since independence of Pakistan in 1947 having multiple causes and dimensions. The conflict has adversely affected Baloch population resulting into rising dissatisfaction level from the state. The prolonged sufferings of population have translated into solemn grievances over the years and set in symptoms of social polarization in Baloch society. Polarization, being a wide ranging phenomenon, has many contributory causes. The article focuses on polarization through the prism of three contributing variable; state of education, health & civic amenities and hypothesises that despite prevailing polarization in Baloch society, province of Balochistan cannot secede from federation of Pakistan.

Introduction

Balochistan is the largest but least developed province of Pakistan which has transitioned from being a loose tribal confederacy to the province of federation of Pakistan since 1970. The socio-political turmoil, faced since independence, had consequential effects on Baloch segment of society of the province. From macro-social standpoint, challenges faced by the Baloch society include limited economic opportunities, demographic imbalance, ubiquitous violence and subversive acts of nationalist groups. These inadequacies had long lasting effects and have caused psycho emotional damage to the society. Having passed through this tumultuous state of affairs
during last few decades, feelings of dissatisfaction and disassociation have entrenched in Baloch society. Lot has been written on existing precarious situation however, there is a need to examine causes and establish consequences of polarization in Baloch society. This phenomenon has entwined causal relationship which needs to be looked through the social, political and economic prisms for drawing meaningful conclusions. The article aims to contribute towards narrowly researched dimensions of social polarization of Baloch society and hypothesises that polarization in Baloch society has not yet touched alarming level where population considers secession as a viable option.

**Society & Social Polarization - Defined**

Since beginning of humanity, society has been continuously passing through evolution. As per Concise Oxford Dictionary (8th edition), “society is a sum of human conditions and activity regarded as a whole functioning interdependently”. Etymologically, the term “society” draws origin from the Latin word *societas*, which in turn, is derived from the noun *socius* (comrade, friend, and ally) used to describe a bond or interaction among parties that are friendly. Adam Smith underscores other aspect of the process highlighting that society may subsist among different men, as among different merchants, from a sense of its utility without any mutual love or affection, if only they refrain from doing injury to each other. Other social scientists have described society as a system of human organisations generating distinctive cultures, patterns, institutions and usually providing protection, security, continuity and national identity to its members. Pakistani society in general, is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, ethnically diverse and heterogeneous mix of five major groups. Baloch segment of overall Pakistani society has remained socially and economically marginalized as compared to the other ethnic groups since last six decades. The social unrest in Baloch society is indicative of gradual transcend of society towards social polarization.
Polarization is a wide ranging phenomenon which starts entrenching in societies where economic and job opportunities are scarce and socio-political aspirations of people remain unaccomplished. The cumulative effect of these elements gives rise to social deprivations and internal conflicts. The sociology literature outlines various notions of polarization. Chakravarty defines polarization as the appearance or disappearance of groups in distribution\textsuperscript{4}. The social instability pushes societies towards polarization which is intimately connected with conflict\textsuperscript{5}. Seshanna and Decornez describe that polarization means a movement towards the poles on any given issue including low income versus high income groups, liberals versus conservatives or the lower class versus the upper class\textsuperscript{6}. Wolfson also asserts that polarization is the disappearing middle of a group to either side of scale\textsuperscript{7}.

The concept of social polarization is even more complex as it is perceived differently by different people. Hamnett concludes that social polarization remains most unclear and ill defined concept; there is uncertainty over its units of measurement, variables and the definition itself.\textsuperscript{8} It is associated with the segregation within a society that may emerge from income inequality, economic displacements and results in such differentiation that would consist of various social groups, from high-income to low-income.\textsuperscript{9} Esteban and Ray describe that social polarization has direct causal relationship with possibility of emergence of social conflicts in a society and explain the process; polarization results from the interaction of within group identity and across group alienation.\textsuperscript{10} From theoretical standpoint, these scholars highlighted that intensity of conflict increases with the increasing level of polarization.\textsuperscript{11}

Social polarization has four basic characteristics; individual groups as main actors, high degree of groups’ heterogeneity, increased intensity with increased homogeneity and lesser number of significant groups.\textsuperscript{12} Historically, social polarization had devastating effects on societies and has resulted in disintegration of republic of Weimar,\textsuperscript{13} end of Russian revolution\textsuperscript{14} and few other political order
Esteban and Ray maintain that presence of three features is essential for occurrence of polarization in society; there must be homogeneity within in each cluster, there must be heterogeneity across clusters and there must be small number of significantly sized groups. Lozada theorizes that social polarization entails concentration of groups or clusters based on class, ethnicity or race. Interestingly, Blanco and Ramos concluded that the larger the inter-group heterogeneity, more alienation and larger the intra-group homogeneity greater the dilemma of identity thus more the social polarization.

Baloch Society

For the last few centuries, Balochistan has been inhabited by three major racial groups; Baloch, Pashtun and Brauhis with a sprinkle of few other small communities. Demographic distribution as per 1998 census (last censure undertaken in the country) is; Baloch and Brauhis 54.76%, Pashtuns 29.64%, Sindhis 5.58%, Punjabis 2.52%, Saraikies 2.42%, Urdu speaking 0.97% and Hazaras, Makranis, Kurds and others altogether about 4.11%. North part of Balochistan is dominated by Pashtun community whereas southern swaths are populated by Baloch segment. The peculiar tribal structure of Baloch society is the most significant feature.

Baloch segment of society has strong sense of ethnic consciousness, political alienation and socio-economic deprivations. Out of many causes of polarization, social indicators in terms of education, healthcare and civic amenities have been selected as contributing variables for analysis of polarization.

Social Indicators

Social indicators are like barometer for determining the quality of life of the population. From psychological standpoint, perceptions are driven by comparisons. A segment of society observing other part enjoying better quality of life starts feeling deprived and dissatisfied. Prolonged
deprivations breed dissatisfaction and consequently result in dissociative proclivities. Townsend contends that people are deprived if they lack the types of diet, health, clothing, housing, household facilities, fuel, educational, working and social conditions, activities and facilities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged and approved, in the societies to which they belong. Almost all elements for deprivation, as identified by Townsend, are abundantly present in Baloch society. A comparative table of summary for education, health and few other amenities between Balochistan and other provinces of Pakistan clearly show the dearth and deficiencies.

**Provincial Comparison**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Indicators</th>
<th>Sindh 30.43 M</th>
<th>Punjab 73.62 M</th>
<th>Balochistan 6.55 M</th>
<th>KP 17.73 M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Rate</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Enrolment Rate</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSDP for Education</td>
<td>Rs 4.5B</td>
<td>Rs 10.4B</td>
<td>Rs 1.6B</td>
<td>Rs 9.3B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>52,847</td>
<td>50,514</td>
<td>3760</td>
<td>14,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist Doctors (out of total no of doctors)</td>
<td>7929</td>
<td>13,565</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>3553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant Mortality Rate/1000</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Drinking Water</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Sanitation</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Table compiled from data of Pakistan Education Statistics 2011-12, Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) 2011-2012, Population figures as per 1998 census of Pakistan, Punjab Health Department and Population Welfare Dept Govt. of KP
For establishing level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction of masses as a measure for polarization estimate, an independent field survey with respect to education and healthcare facilities through a questionnaire in 8 districts of Balochistan (Gwadar, Kalat, Khuzdar, awaran, Kech, Kohlu, Kharan and Dera Bugti) was undertaken. One hundred respondents per district were randomly selected for input through stratified random sampling where education was the first stratum, healthcare facilities was the second stratum and civic amenities formed third stratum. The age group of the respondents ranged from 18 to 60 years having different education levels and backgrounds. Response from 590 (73%) respondents was received for further analysis. For simplification, graphs depict percentages of the response rounded off to 100. Findings of the survey with respect to education are depicted through graph and are explained below:

**Source:** Graph is based on respondents’ input of field survey undertaken for this article.

The graph illustrates findings of various aspects of state of education in the province. Response against four most important modules have been shown in the graph. The bars show the percentage of respondents’ feedback against each
attribute which had few sub clauses as well. Eight percent of respondents were satisfied with availability of education facilities, 11% were less satisfied and 22% were generally satisfied whereas remaining 59 percent were completely dissatisfied. Findings of the survey further revealed that only 4% of the population was fully satisfied with physical state of educational institutions of the province whereas 43% were completely dissatisfied. The survey showed that only 8% of the sample population was fully satisfied against 55% of completely dissatisfied with teacher’s competency. The level of satisfaction against government support for education was 11% against 38% of generally satisfied people, however 22% of the sample was completely dissatisfied. The inference drawn out of these findings was that population is completely dissatisfied with respect to educational facilities in the province.

**Healthcare Facilities**

Non availability of good healthcare facilities is a major source of discontentment amongst population. Perpetual absence of these facilities directly affects the general health, life expectancy, infant and maternal mortality rates. From analysis of Health Deprivation Index data research report of SPDC,\textsuperscript{22} it is concluded that Balochistan has the highest average health deprivation index in comparison to other provinces: (Balochistan: 35.15, KP: 27.16, Punjab: 23.52 and Sindh: 29.93). A comparison of existing healthcare facilities among other provinces is shown below:

**Comparison of Healthcare Facilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthcare Facilities</th>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Sindh</th>
<th>Punjab</th>
<th>Balochistan</th>
<th>KP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>209</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispensaries</td>
<td>2152</td>
<td>1501</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>730</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity &amp; Child Welfare Centres</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Beds in hospitals</td>
<td>28671</td>
<td>47033</td>
<td>6923</td>
<td>19669</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source**: Pakistan Statistical Year Book 2011,
The second part of survey questionnaire consisted of sample's feedback with respect to availability of healthcare services. Questionnaire addressed various aspects of healthcare for establishing satisfaction level of survey sample. Response of the sample has been illustrated through graph and explained below:

Source: Graph is based on respondents’ input of field survey undertaken for this article

It is evident from the graph that 77% of the respondents were completely dissatisfied with the availability of healthcare facilities. The meagre 3% satisfied population lived in cities rather than in remote villages. For availability of doctors, 84% of the sample was completely dissatisfied against 2% of fully satisfied. Non availability of free medicines remained the most dissatisfying aspect of healthcare services. Malpractices and corruption of officials was attributed as main cause by respondents. Government’s will in establishing of healthcare facilities was adjudged as negligible as 82% of the respondents showed their complete dissatisfaction in this regard. Graph shows that majority of the sample population is falling in most dissatisfied bracket with respect to available healthcare facilities. The inference drawn from these findings is that
population is extremely dissatisfied with respect to availability of healthcare facilities in the province.

**State of Civic Amenities**

Apart from education and healthcare facilities, access to daily life civic amenities like electricity, clean drinking water and sanitation are the bare minimum requirements of good living which attributes towards satisfaction level of population. The province visibly lags behind in social and physical infrastructure. Only 25% of the villages have been provided with electricity, 20% of population has access to safe drinking water and 7% of the houses have sanitation facilities. Natural gas was discovered in 1952 and supplies 38% of Pakistan’s domestic (now reduced to 19%) and commercial energy needs but only 6% of Balochistan’s population has a gas connection. Non availability of these basic amenities as compared to other provinces has generated sense of deprivation amongst masses of Balochistan Province.

Stable safety and security environment reduces polarization to a larger extent. However, state of law and order in the province has remained very volatile for the last few decades. People have been targeted by nationalist groups fighting for independence/secession of the province. External interference is another cause for poor security situation thus, polarizing the society. During last 8 years, 3476 people (including civilians and security personnel) have lost their lives. This carnage had lasting impact on the psycho-social behaviour of the people of Balochistan in general and Baloch people in particular. Its after-effects are more pronounced in younger population who is exceedingly resorting to violence to avenge the losses. This is one of the major contributory causes for general unrest and polarization in Baloch society. The table amply manifests the poor law and order situation in the province.
Fatalities in Balochistan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Civilians</th>
<th>Security Forces</th>
<th>Terrorists</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>542</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2268</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>3476</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data retrieved from South Asian Terrorist Portal

Despite presence of many polarizing agents and existence of medium level polarization in society, field survey brought out very interesting finding with respect to secession of province from the state of Pakistan. Selected sample of districts having active separatist movement showed that only 12% of the population perceives seceding as a fruitful option and rest 88% rejected the idea which is a good sign for the federation of Pakistan.

Social Consequences

Demographic balance is fervently guarded by communities living in socially polarized environs. A large ethnic Baloch population has migrated towards Sind because of economic compulsions and as a result, today more ethnic Baloch live outside Balochistan than inside. Moreover, during Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, a large number of Pashtuns migrated to border areas of Pakistan. As per United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report 2013, Balochistan still hosts 1.6 million Afghan refugees (Pashtuns) settled in border areas in North Western part of Balochistan. The ethnic Baloch community having low population density has became apprehensive that large influx of Pashtuns has
disturbed existing demographic balance of the province thus increasing friction between two major communities living peacefully side by side for centuries.

Furthermore, ethnic Baloch also fear that their representation in the government, both provincial and national level would be affected which will in turn, jeopardize their political aspirations. Concurrently, this apprehension induced unification of Baloch and Brauhi tribes to safeguard their common interests of maintaining majority against Pashtuns.

Geographic vastnesses, absence of commuting infrastructure complemented with nomadic way of life are major impediments in developing civic infrastructure in Balochistan. Despite all these inherent difficulties, the central and provincial governments did not fulfil their responsibilities by adopting pragmatic strategies for development of the province. The role of political leadership has been found amiss in development matrix of the province due to internal power struggle and tribal divide. Consequently, as an alternate means of livelihood illegal activities like smuggling, drug trafficking and other social crimes have permeated deep into the society. This aspect is another factor affecting negatively on society and slipping it towards polarization.

Vibrant economy produces stable society and both are complimentary to each other. In case of Balochistan, neither sound economy nor dynamic society could thrive because of multiple reasons which have attributed to this remorseful state include; mismanagement of resources, unbridled corruption and peculiar internal dynamics of tribal structure.

The land of Balochistan is endowed with rich natural resources having immense economic prospects but has not been fully explored even after six decades of independence. Lack of skilled workforce, lower technological and industrial base, absence of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in the mineral projects due to security reasons are a few causes to mention. Consequently, Baloch society economically suffered
which pushed the poor majority further into the vicious circle of poverty. Endemic poverty, negligible economic growth, and unemployment has fetched hopelessness causing grave sense of alienation. These feelings of deprivation are not completely unjustified and are embedded in the society.

The successive federal and provincial governments cannot be exonerated from the responsibility of not investing much in the province and human resource development. On the other hand, Sardars availed all opportunities of economic emancipation but did not distribute the dividends to the members of the tribes. Consuelo Corradi argues that violence is the instrument used with purpose of obtaining the redistribution of scarce resources; power of authority, economic privileges, access to opportunity or changes in the political system. The negative psychosomatic sentiments of Baloch society are regularly inflamed by nationalist elements for furthering their own political cause.

State of education in Balochistan, in comparison with other provinces, is dismal. The absence of this most important element of social life, which helps in shaping the future of generations, has been left unattended. The outcome has long term adverse effects in societal development of Balochistan. As a consequence, local human resource could not be developed to fill the available jobs both in government and private sectors.

Condition of health infrastructure in Balochistan is not very encouraging as well. It is of rudimentary level which repudiates even reasonable healthcare facilities for the masses. The cumulative effect of this leads to dissatisfaction and disappointment in society which is evident from the demand of the population, hospitals and schools being the foremost.

The inaccessibility to various civic facilities has negative emotional and psychological effects on population which is suffering from sense of relative deprivation. Ted Gurr affirms that psychological and social sources that nourish
potentials of collective violence are to be found in a feeling of relative deprivation. 28 Hence, relatively deprived Baloch society is going through trauma and has started resorting to violence for their rights.

**Political Consequences**

Balochistan has been in political turmoil since its accession with the state of Pakistan. Elected provincial governments have been dismissed by the central government on various pretexts which has precluded development of sustained political thought giving rise to nationalistic proclivity. The nationalist movements with separatist leanings have been politically active since early 70s and have managed to take political charge of the province occasionally. Interestingly, whenever nationalist elements were in power in Balochistan, province further slipped deeper into political unrest because of internal tribal power struggle. This political polarization in the province resulted in non-addressing of social needs of common people.

The violence in the province and state response through military means has complemented each other. Baloch perceive these military accesses by federal government as infringement to their basic right of freedom. Manwaring observes that 'lack of faith in improvement makes reform difficult if not impossible' 29 which has been a case in Balochistan. The net effect of all this turmoil and bloodletting has been social seclusion which is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live. 30

The separatist forces of Balochistan are trying to carve out an independent state by seceding from federation of Pakistan since long, without much success. As per 'no-fault' theory secession should be granted whenever people of certain territory express their will to form an independent state through a referendum however, majority of scholars argue
that secession should be granted only when a qualified ‘super majority’ expresses its will for independent state. Horowitz suggests that secession can only be sustainable when over 70% of the population supports the idea. In case of Balochistan, secession is less likely to succeed because only 3 out of 27 noticeable tribes are involved in separatist activities only, critical mass and organization for outright rebellion are missing and Sardars can easily be divided and conquered. Presence of large number of Pashtuns (30%) population in the province is another big hurdle against secession. Low population density is another major cause for non accomplishment of separatist agenda. Under these hard realities, secession, if ever attempted, will result in civil war and bloodshed and may engulf Pashtuns of Afghanistan as well.

Polarization of Baloch population is mainly because of marginalization and dispossession. The compulsive non-participatory role given to Baloch politicians in development projects and general masses has taken the population further away from the centre.

As highlighted by Sandole who quotes Zeeman ‘efforts to continue socializing oppressed people into compliance normative systems via punitive means reaches a critical threshold... then given a small increase of further realist stimulus, a given person may catastrophically change direction on the obedience – resistance gradient and attack the oppressor’. This scholarly conclusion is applicable in Balochistan. The fear is that any fresh watershed event (like killing of Akbar Bugti) may create a snowball effect of disobedience from general masses by challenging state writ.

The ongoing sectarian killings of Hazara community are also a source of serious concern. Though the magnitude of this problem has not yet reached to a very alarming level, however, it has the potential to expand and explode. As a consequence, Hazara community may take up arms against foes in vengeance if pushed to the wall.
Conclusion

Balochistan is a land of great potentials having rich history, culture and traditions. Baloch people are brave, sturdy, hospitable and have flavour of arrogance in their demeanour. They are proud inhabitants of this ‘graveyard of empires’. Since accession to Pakistan, Balochistan has faced many upheavals; blow to the tribal structure, political suppressions, economic degradation and social turmoil. The psycho-social fibre of Baloch society has suffered with long-lasting marks of deprivation and alienation. On the other hand, widespread poverty in Baloch society is the cause of internal unrest as well as the instigator of feeling of deprivation. The indifferent attitude of leadership has resulted in sinking the Baloch society deeper into the poverty quagmire. The influx of Afghan refugees has created a demographic imbalance in Baloch society which is perceived as a marginalization attempt. During the course of research for this article, physical interaction with many ethnic Baloch young and old men and women revealed that they needed respectful treatment, economic empowerment and proportionate share in the political dispensation and jobs which are considered rightful demands. State level interventions for increase in funds allocation from divisible pool. The 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award with revision for distribution formula are well taken by majority of the population.

Introduction of 18th constitutional amendment has fulfilled the demand of provincial autonomy to quite an extent and it was an encouraging finding of this research article that despite all these upheavals, Baloch population still hopes for better future while being with the state of Pakistan. The present despondency, despair and dejection being symptoms of polarization have not yet overrun the Baloch society but need a quick fix.

The political exclusion of Baloch population from the power precluded it from integrating into main stream politics of the country. The protracted political isolation had brought
Baloch people to a stage where it believes less in political dialogue. However, general election of 2013 brought nationalists’ political forces to power in the province once again. In a recent interview (January 22, 2014), Chief Minister of the province has categorically stated that Baloch are regaining trust in federation and now it depends on federation to deal province justly which is an encouraging development.

Decentralization through 18th constitutional amendment has further consolidated power in the hands of provincial administration which is helping in overall social and political integration of the province with federation and gradually reducing secessionist proclivities. Nationalists’ narrative with small exceptions is also of accommodative orientation and needs minor nudge for positive snowball effect for stimulating positivity. All these indicators based on writers’ personal experience require policy response and if actions are not generated quickly, phenomenon of polarization will take effect which will be even more difficult to eradicate.

Notes
2 This definition is an amalgamation of various definitions presented by different social scientists in their seminal works.
3 Major ethnic groups living within political boundary of Pakistan include; Punjabies, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Balochies and Muhajirs.
13 The Weimar Republic is the name given by historians to the federal republic and semi presidential representative democracy established in 1919 in Germany to replace the imperial form of government.
19 The exact percentage of Brahis (out of 54.76%) is not available in Official Census Records as both the groups claim to have Baloch identity.
24 Bansal Alok, Balochistan in Turmoil, (Delhi: Manas Publisher, 2010), 233.
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deserve and what they actually believe they can get; in short the disparity
between aspirations and achievements.

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